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SUBJECT: PANJSHIR: THE PROVINCE THAT WORKS - PART I

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Panjshir province is a unique success story within Afghanistan. Having achieved unparalleled security, poppy-free status, and solid governance largely free from corruption, Panjshir has set the stage for further development, including roads and mining. The Panjshiris have accomplished all of this with no Coalition forces other than the U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), no Afghan National Army (ANA), few NGOs, and limited resources from Kabul. This cable addresses security and counter-narcotics in Panjshir, while Part II will address governance and development.

SECURITY

2. (SBU) In the second half of 2008, there were no significant security incidents in Panjshir. The reasons for this unparalleled security, accomplished with no ANA or Coalition maneuver forces, include strong provincial leadership, rugged geography, mono-ethnicity (Tajik), and Panjshir's Mujahedeen culture. This security starts at the only easily-accessible vehicular entrance to the province -- the "Lion's Gate." Afghan National Police (ANP) carefully scrutinize vehicles passing through the gate, with random vehicle searches common. Even nomadic Kuchis passing through the gate are required to individually register when entering and departing Panjshir. At the heart of Panjshir's success is what the PRT calls the "neighborhood watch" -- an informal network of Mujahedeen, mullahs and ordinary villagers throughout the valley. They effectively function as the eyes and ears of the provincial ANP and National Directorate for Security (NDS). The governor actively utilizes this network, transmitting word of security threats through Panjshir's 669 mosques, which then alert villagers to be especially vigilant.

3. (SBU) Concerned over instability in several of the seven provinces that border Panjshir, Governor Bahlol would like to see an increase in the number of ANP in the province from the current authorization of 630 to at least 750. Sufficient fuel for the ANP's vehicles remains an on-going problem, with ANP commanders regularly approaching the PRT for fuel. While the governor is very much at home exercising leadership over the ANP and NDS in the valley, he has told the PRT he would not like any additional ANA in Panjshir beyond the few soldiers guarding MOD weapons stockpiles and a small ANA recruiting post presently in the province. Unlike the ANP, most of whom are Panjshiri and act under the direction of the governor, ANA forces would be drawn from all over Afghanistan and would be operationally under the control of the central government.

4. (SBU) Panjshir actively cooperates with UNAMA in the Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG) process, with the Anaba district declared Afghanistan's first "Peaceful District" under Phase IV of

DIAG. The governor has, however, complained that UNAMA is taking too long in providing the \$300,000 in DIAG award money promised to Anaba, and said that other districts will not turn in additional weapons until UNAMA makes good on the money already promised. While Governor Bahlol has on several occasions told the PRT that UNAMA has disarmed the Panjshiri Mujahedeen, this claim is effectively impossible to verify given the countless potential hiding places for weapons throughout the valley. Furthermore, the governor has also clearly stated that Mujahedeen will defend the province against any potential Taliban attack, suggesting they still possess the means to do so.

COUNTER-NARCOTICS

15. (SBU) In recognition of its poppy-free status, Panjshir received \$1.4 million in funding in 2008 under the Good Performance Initiative (GPI). Panjshir elected to use the funds for the purchase of farm tractors, threshers and trailers, along with approximately 95,000 fruit trees, and seven green houses. Panjshir's poppy-free status was briefly in question in fall 2008 when a PRT visit to a remote village exposed approximately two acres of poppies under cultivation. The PRT reported the find to the governor, who immediately dispatched the provincial ANP commander along with approximately 40 ANP to the village to destroy the plants and arrest their cultivators. A subsequent visit to the village confirmed that the poppies had in fact been eradicated.

DELL